ANTONIN, CLAUDINE. The Legacy of Romantic Love in The Great Gatsby and The Sun Also Rises. (1970) Directed by: Dr. Robert O. Stephens. pp. 68

The purpose of this paper is to study The Great Gatsby and The Sun Also Rises in the light of Denis de Rougemont's conception of Courtly Love, showing how the two novels manifest the persistency of the Tristan Myth, as well as the process of degradation it has undergone. Both works are closely related, in time, in theme and in narrative technique. Both are a critique of Romanticism and refer constantly to the Courtly tradition. Very few critics, however, have made a connection between them, and no parallel study of the Romantic theme has yet been done. Using a close reading of the texts and available critical commentary, this paper points out the numerous affinities between the Courtly Myth and Hemingway's and Fitzgerald's characters, their relationships and their worlds. Finally I discuss the main reasons for the failure of the Myth in its modern context.

The main difference between the pictures of Romanticism that we find in Fitzgerald and Hemingway lies in the value which is given to the vision of the idealistic character. Fitzgerald is sympathetic to his romantic lover, whereas Hemingway shuts all the magic out of the Romantic

dream. The similarities in theme and contrast in point of view suggest that The Sun Also Rises has been partly written as an ironical counterpoint to The Great Gatsby.

# THE LEGACY OF ROMANTIC LOVE IN THE GREAT GATSBY AND THE SUN ALSO RISES

by

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A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Greensboro
June, 1970

Approved by

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APPROVAL SHEET

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author gratefully acknowledges the guidance and assistance of Dr. Robert O. Stephens in the preparation of this thesis.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to The Houses that James Built, R. W. Stallman claims that "What's discovered here is that Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises is built upon the same blueprint Fitzgerald devised for his Great Gatsby."[1] One must remember that The Great Gatsby was published in April, 1925 and that Hemingway started writing The Sun Also Rises in July of the same year. In August Hemingway visited Fitzgerald and showed him a draft of his novel, which he later revised as a result of Fitzgerald's criticism.[2] Moreover, there are other kinships between the two books: both are a critique of Romanticism, both treat the theme of the innocent outsider who aspires to an alien social world and incarnates his dream in an inaccessible woman, and both use the same narrative technique. Nevertheless, very few critics have made a connection between these two works. William

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[1] R. W. Stallman, The Houses that James Built (Michigan, 1961), p. vii.

[2] Kenneth Eble, F. Scott Fitzgerald (New York, 1963), p. 109.

Goldhurst[3] stresses the correspondence between Fitzgerald's and Hemingway's works in general but misses some of the most important points. When speaking of the outsider theme, he compares Robert Cohn to Wolfsheim, but fails to perceive the link between the two Romantic idealists of the novels, Robert Cohn and Jay Gatsby. Only two critics, as far as I know, have seen a definite connection between the two works. One, Paul Lauter, says:

> While there is probably now no way to prove that Hemingway wrote his book partly as a commentary on Fitzgerald's, can the parallels in hero (if we may apply that term to Cohn), narrative technique and subject be altogether accidental?[4]

The other critic, R. W. Stallman, stresses The Great Gatsby's indebtedness to The Waste Land, from which he thinks that Fitzgerald derived the theme of "crossed identities" linked to "the theme of moral and temporal confusion."[5] Through a close and elaborate study of the texts Stallman proceeds then to demonstrate that Hemingway, in turn, derived the leitmotif of confused identities and betrayal from The Great Gatsby. According to his reading, which is interesting but sometimes

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[3]William Goldhurst, F. Scott Fitzgerald and His Contemporaries (Cleveland and New York, 1963).

[4]Paul Lauter, "Pluto's Stepchildren: Gatsby and Cohn," Modern Fiction Studies, IX (Winter 63-64), p. 339.

[5]Stallman, p. 182.

obscure and often too interpretative--the essential characteristics shared by the two narrators, Nick and Jake, are their "duplicity" and their "moral ambivalence."[6] Stallman's study focuses mainly on the similarities in narrative technique, which lead him to state his conviction that Hemingway imitated The Great Gatsby when he wrote The Sun Also Rises.[7]

In addition, there are other pieces of evidence which can be discovered from biographical details. William Goldhurst points out that, in the years 1924-1926 Fitzgerald led an enthusiastic campaign to help Hemingway gain recognition. Fitzgerald was then a recognized writer and Hemingway just "a promising young author." We find in Fitzgerald's letters many references to Hemingway's work and especially an appreciative judgment of The Sun Also Rises.[8] Moreover, Carlos Baker reports that Hemingway had read The Great Gatsby with admiration and that he wrote Maxwell Perkins that it was

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[6]Ibid., p. 178. [7]Ibid., p. 188.

[8]Andrew Turnbull, The Letters of Scott Fitzgerald (New York, 1963), p. 205. To Maxwell Perkins: "I like it with certain qualifications. The fiesta, the fishing trip, the minor characters are fine. The lady I didn't like, perhaps because I don't like the original. In the mutilated man I thought Ernest bit off more than can yet be chewn (sic) between the covers of a book."

"an absolutely first rate book."[9] In The Last Laocoon Robert Sklar tells how, in 1925:

> The friendship between Fitzgerald and Hemingway grew close. Both men were very competitive. Hemingway no doubt recognized, after The Great Gatsby, that Fitzgerald was the man to beat.[10]

At the time, Hemingway seemed very happy to profit by Fitzgerald's interest and connections, to discuss professional matters with him endlessly and to be known as his friend. But curiously enough, after The Sun Also Rises was published, with the resultant success, the two friends drew apart, and that was not Fitzgerald's doing. "Hemingway's manner toward Fitzgerald changed," Robert Sklar writes, "in keeping with his conviction that he had proved himself far superior as a man and as a writer."[11] As early as 1926 Hemingway showed anger at being compared to Fitzgerald. He wrote Maxwell Perkins about a parallel a critic had drawn between This Side of Paradise and The Sun Also Rises, "It's funny to write a book that seems as tragic as that and have them take it for

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[9]Carlos Baker, Ernest Hemingway. A Life Story (New York, 1969), p. 146.

[10]Robert Sklar, F. Scott Fitzgerald. The Last Laocoön (New York, 1967), p. 208.

[11]Sklar, p. 218.

a jazz superficial story."[12] Morley Callaghan, remembering the year 1928-1929, mentions the fact that Hemingway always avoided discussing Fitzgerald's work and that he had never heard him praise one of his books.[13] So it seems that the composition of The Sun Also Rises marked a climax and then a break in the friendship between the two men. After its publication everything indicates that Hemingway strove to repudiate any connection between Fitzgerald's work and his own, as he did it too with Gertrude Stein and Sherwood Anderson.[14] Each time he mentioned Fitzgerald, in letters, in interviews and especially in "The Snows of the Kilimanjaro" and A Moveable Feast, Hemingway used the same patronizing tone that Jake Barnes uses toward Robert Cohn. Everywhere he displayed a deep scorn for Fitzgerald's view of life and society.[15] One can wonder if Hemingway did not resent Fitzgerald's irreducible loyalty in love and friendship, which

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[12]Carlos Baker, Hemingway. The Writer as Artist (Princeton, 1963), p. 79.

[13]Morley Callaghan, That Summer in Paris (New York, 1963), p. 170.

[14]Philip Young, Ernest Hemingway. A Reconsideration (University Park and London, 1966), p. 186.

[15]Carlos Baker, Ernest Hemingway. A Life Story (New York, 1969), p. 238. See how Hemingway wrote to Maxwell Perkins about "Fitzgerald's damned bloody romanticism."

were truly chivalrous and which reminded him of his own shortcomings in that respect. Whatever praise he granted to Fitzgerald in A Moveable Feast is skillfully intermingled with derision and expressed in a condescending manner. Thus, comparing Fitzgerald's talent to the light pattern in a butterfly's wing, Hemingway observes sententiously that Fitzgerald was not aware of it as long as he had it, and that when he grew aware of it, it was lost and "he could not fly anymore."[16] In other words, Hemingway insinuates that Fitzgerald was only an example of the American writer who fails to reach his literary maturity and disintegrates under the pressure of economics and criticism. In this last book he goes as far as to deny that he received any help from Fitzgerald on The Sun Also Rises and that he did not care at all for his advice,[17] a statement which is in flat contradiction with other biographical information on the subject.[18] Why then did Hemingway wait so long to put the facts straight? Like the lady who protests too much, Hemingway's constant belittling of Fitzgerald, even beyond death, appears as the surest sign of his indebtedness to him.

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[16]Ernest Hemingway, A Moveable Feast (New York, 1964), p. 147.

[17]Ibid., pp. 184,185.

[18]Carlos Baker, op. cit., p. 592; Kenneth Eble, op. cit., p. 109.

In The Art of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sergio Perosa points out that Fitzgerald was the first American writer to show a deep interest in the theme of love per se. Before him,

> The ambiguity and the complexity of love are never the object of analysis in American fiction, but rather a mere pretext for metaphysical explorations.[19]

One would look in vain in American letters for a novel of passion comparable to Anna Karenina, The Red and the Black or Wuthering Heights. In The Scarlet Letter, Hawthorne deals with the theme of adultery, but the novel opens after the love story has ended, and the author is concerned not with a study of love, but with the aftermath of sin. In Hemingway, Perosa sees the theme of love as "just a marginal motive."[20] While it is important in such a novel as A Farewell to Arms, it shares the foreground with other themes, war for example. The one work by Hemingway in which love is the main theme is The Sun Also Rises, written during the short period of close companionship between him and Fitzgerald. I suspect that Hemingway took up the Romantic love theme, so essential in Fitzgerald's work, and used it in such a way that his own novel can be read as an ironical counterpoint

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[19]Sergio Perosa, The Art of F. Scott Fitzgerald (Ann Arbor, 1965), p. 189.

[20]Ibid., p. 189.

to The Great Gatsby. But before going further, it is necessary to define the origin and content of that Romantic Love theme, or Tristan theme, which runs through the two novels and pairs them together, somewhat like the two antithetical parts of the Romance of the Rose.

In his book Love in the Western World, Denis de Rougemont analyzes the origin of the Courtly Myth and its influence on Western literature up to the present day. He stresses that the concept of Romantic Love, which sprang up in Provence during the twelfth century, was an entirely new conception of the relationship between man and woman. It is not to be found in classical literature or in the literature of the Dark Ages. Rougemont thus sees the concept of Romantic Love as giving birth to an enduring literary tradition, which he calls "the Myth of Tristan." When speaking of love or passion I will refer in this paper to Rougemont's conception. Moreover his originality lies in his explanation of the sudden birth of Courtly Love as the persistence of Celtic doctrines and especially of Manichaeism which spread all over Europe from the third century onward, in spite of Christian evangelism. According to the Manicheans, the soul is imprisoned in the body, which is Night, and aspires to Light and Eternity. There then ensues a struggle between the flesh and the

spirit, Sexual Love and Divine Love. Physical life came to be considered as utter misery and death as "the ultimate good."[21] Man could reach the light on earth only through "the progressive death of a deliberate askesis."[22] The word askesis means exercise or initiation and involves a notion of deprivation, of shedding off all material satisfactions. Manichean attitudes were in violent opposition to Christian doctrines; for example, they decried procreation but not sexual pleasure. Consequently, suspected Manicheans were regarded as a threat to society and were fiercly persecuted--finally being compelled to put on the disguise of myth. Thus the mystical tone in which the Troubadour extolled his lady, and the religious ritual through which he approached her are due to the fact that she was no real woman but a symbol of Light, Truth and the Other World to which he aspired. Such was Iseult for Tristan. The four elements constituting a passion such as theirs are: first, the religion of love--the lovers are more in love with love than with each other; second, the need for obstruction; third, the enjoyment of suffering; and fourth, suffering as a way to reach self-awareness. It is not the satisfaction of love which inspires

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[21]Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World (New York, 1956), p. 69.

[22]Ibid.

the poet and his reader, but its branding, its askesis. The master-stroke of the lost French original of the Story of Tristan (about 1150)--which made it differ from all the Irish legends which might have inspired it--was its conception of love leading the lovers to a triumphant death. Wagner found this idea in Gottfried Von Strasburg and drew from it the entire design of his Tristan and the conception of Liebestod, or the freedom of love in death. W. A. Nitze agrees with Rougemont when stressing the fact that:

> If love meant surrender and death, it also meant liberation for those to whom life--in the material sense--is merely a physical encumbrance. The Liebestod is not annihilation; it is joy and freedom. It is the paen of all who have really felt.[23]

In his definition of Courtly Love, C. S. Lewis does not lay so much emphasis on the importance of suffering, but he stresses the element of humility. He writes, "The lover is always abject."[24] Taking woman as symbol for the other world was ambiguous in that "it tended to mingle sexual attraction with eternal desire."[25] Having lost its mystical content, Passion

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[23]W. A. Nitze, Arthurian Romance and Modern Poetry and Music (Chicago, 1940), p. 29.

[24]C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 2.

[25]Rougemont, p. 66.

became a mere "exaltation of narcissism," love for love's sake, retaining a false element of transcendence.[26] Besides tracing the origin of the Myth, Rougemont's purpose was to show how the whole body of European literature testifies to its progressive "profanation"--a word he uses in both senses of "sacrilege" and "secularization"[27]--and how unrelenting its hold is on the Western psyche. It is his contention that

> The passion which novels and films have now popularized is nothing else than a lawless invasion and flowing back into our lives of a spiritual heresy the key to which we have lost.[28]

In Love and Death in the American Novel, Leslie Fiedler denies that Courtly Love had any influence on American literature. Contrary to Rougemont, who underlines the importance of the theme of adultery, Fiedler argues that it is missing in American fiction and gives the example of the realistic novelist William Dean Howells who never touched on adultery in his fourteen novels.[29] It might be true that the Romantic tradition had little influence on American literature up to the First World War, for American literature was born in the Age of Reason, at a time when the

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[26] Ibid., p. 179. [27] Ibid., p. 184. [28] Ibid., p. 145.

[29] Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York, 1966), p. 55.

Romantic Myth was in eclipse even in Europe. America was commonly compared to the old Roman Republic, that is, to a patriarchal society with frugal manners and strict morals. The imagination of readers and writers alike was turned toward the frontier, the wilderness, the world of innocence and adventure, action and male companionship. There was no room in that world for the Romantic Myth. But, as soon as there was no more frontier, and American society started to become more sophisticated, as soon as the American woman started to assert herself and the barriers of Puritanism came down, the myth of Romantic Love was reborn. It seems to me that adultery thrives in the literature of the twenties. Through the centuries the myth has become corrupted in both form and content but it is unmistakably there.

Actually one of the traits of the twenties was the development of a new consciousness of myth in literature. Charles Moorman explains such interest in both psychological and historical terms. Historically it can be accounted for by the impact of works such as Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough or Jessie L. Weston's From Ritual to Romance, which gave birth to a new theory of criticism at the beginning of the century. Psychologically it can be ascribed to a search

for certainty in a chaotic world:

> The literature of these interbellum years is filled with a yearning for order, for a way out of what Eliot called a waste land and Gertrude Stein a lost generation.[30]

Myth had the advantage of providing the artist with a world of symbols, already coherent and meaningful, which he could use to order his own experience and substantiate it. Moorman remarks that a poet's own symbols cannot compete with the connotative wealth of the myth symbol.[31] Thus T. S. Eliot availed himself of the Arthurian myth of the Fisher-King, in which he found "an objective correlative" well fitted to translate his own response to the moral and spiritual sterility of the modern world.

The Waste Land, of which Fitzgerald was a great admirer, was published in 1922. The "Valley of Ashes," which is situated near the Wilson's garage in The Great Gatsby and over which broods the dismal eyes of T. J. Eckleburg, is referred to by Fitzgerald as "the waste land,"[32] suggesting that

> . . . it stands as a symbol for the spiritual arridity of the civilization about which he writes--

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[30]Charles Moorman, Arthurian Triptych (Berkeley, 1960), p. 2.

[31]Ibid., p. 20.

[32]F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York, 1925), p. 24.

> the kind of barren and waterless land T. S. Eliot had conceived in his poem of that name.[33]

The affinities with T. S. Eliot are still more apparent in The Sun Also Rises, in spite of Hemingway's open dislike for the poet (but was it not Hemingway's habit to decry every living writer he owed something to?). Jake has been called "Hemingway's Fisher King,"[34] because of his wound, because of his fishing trip, because his world had gone sterile too. Hemingway's Paris can be paralleled with Eliot's London. In either place love has grown mechanical and meaningless; both works point out the loss of belief and the capacity for commitment which were characteristic of the era.[35]

Myth was in the air. In his book Hemingway on Love,[36] R. W. Lewis discusses the pattern of the Tristan theme in the relationship between Brett and Jake in The Sun Also Rises, but this essay, to the extent that it argues a special thesis, is not exhaustive. Nowhere in the documents I have

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[33]James E. Miller, The Fictional Technique of Scott F. Fitzgerald (The Hague Martinus Nijhoff, 1957), p. 106.

[34]Philip Young, pp. 87,88.

[35]See Mark Spilka, "The Death of Love in The Sun Also Rises," Ernest Hemingway. Critiques of Four Major Novels, ed. Carlos Baker (New York, 1962), pp. 18-25.

[36]R. W. Lewis, Jr., Hemingway on Love (Austin and London, 1965); see Chapter II, "Tristan or Jacob."

consulted, however, did I find reference to a special interest of either Fitzgerald or Hemingway in the Tristan Story or in any body of Medieval literature. Nonetheless, The Great Gatsby and The Sun Also Rises manifest clearly the persistency of the Courtly Love Myth and also the process of degradation it has undergone. In fact, the presence of mythical elements in these works, independently of a self-conscious scholarly method such as the one used by T. S. Eliot, is all the more revealing for my study. Only the most obvious and superficial courtly elements have been pointed out in The Great Gatsby. No parallel study of the motif in the two novels has yet been done and so it is my hope to demonstrate both the presence of the motif and its parallel use in Fitzgerald and Hemingway.

## CHAPTER II

## THE ROMANTIC CHARACTERS

It is my intention now to examine the more obvious parallels of the Courtly Love tradition with reference to certain characters of Hemingway and Fitzgerald, their romantic relationships, and their worlds. I would like first to consider those novelistic characters who resemble romantic prototypes.

Most of the time in the old Romances,[1] the hero has been brought up by foster-parents; his origins are mysterious and he is careful to maintain the mystery. Thus Tristan makes his appearance at King Mark's court under a false identity; the tale he presents of his life is a clever weaving of truth and lie. In the same way Gatsby's past excites the curiosity of his guests, and the account he gives of it to Nick is a blending of fiction and reality. Tristan was an

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[1]For the main characteristics of the Courtly characters I relied upon the following works: Berous, Tristan et Iseult (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1966); Gottfried Von Strasbourg, The Story of Tristan and Iseult (London, 1899); Sir Lancelot of the Lake (anonymous), translated by Lucy Allen Paton (London, 1929); Ulrich Von Zatzikhoven, Lanzelet (New York, 1951).

orphan, but very much attached to his foster-parents. Gatsby, on the other hand, never "accepted his parents"[2] (p. 99). The only photo he keeps in his home is the one of Dan Cody, his benefactor who was really his foster father, to whom he owes all he has learned about life. Like Tristan, Gatsby has been wrongfully deprived of his inheritance. Owing to some legal device the twenty-five thousand dollars Cody had left Jay all went to Cody's mistress (p. 101). The falsehood motif is recurrent in the Tristan myth; it is essential in Gatsby also. Tristan assumes a false identity in order to be admitted to Iseult's environment. In the same manner Gatsby enters Daisy's home in disguise, letting her think that he belongs to the same world as herself, and that he could take care of her. Every courtly hero has to undergo some kind of chivalric upbringing, in order to give proof of physical as well as moral courage and excellence. Gatsby receives such training in the war, in which he "did extraordinarily well" (p. 150). Like Tristan, who was protected by a magic sword, Gatsby seems "to bear an enchanted life" (p. 66) in the midst of battle.

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[2]Citations from Fitzgerald in the text are from The Great Gatsby, Scribner Library Edition (New York, 1953).

Similarities with the courtly characters are not so important or numerous in The Sun Also Rises as they are in The Great Gatsby, but they are worth mentioning. Robert Cohn has no foster-parents, though being a Jew he might be considered to have a special origin. He has not been so fortunate as to go through the initiation of battle. One can say, though, that he has gained some chivalric training through the practice of sports. A very good tennis player and football end, he has also succeeded in becoming the middleweight boxing champion of Princeton. Even though he disliked boxing,

> . . . he learned it painfully and thoroughly to counteract the feeling of inferiority and shyness he had felt on being treated as a Jew at Princeton.[3] (p. 3)

Besides such qualities of physical endurance and moral perseverance, Cohn has a chivalric sense of fair play. Jake says that he loved to win but never got angry at being beaten in tennis (p. 45). After a fight, either with Jake or Romero, he insists on shaking hands with his unwilling adversary (p. 201).

Another characteristic of the courtly hero is his attractiveness to women. It is said that Gatsby knew women

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[3]Citations from Hemingway in the text are from The Sun Also Rises, Scribner Library Edition (New York, 1954).

early and that he scorned them, because they spoiled him (p. 99). Success with women came later to Cohn, who grew popular with women only after the publication of his novel, a modern feat which might be regarded as the equivalent of winning in battle. According to the rules of Courtly Love, politeness, courtesy and sobriety are required from the lover in every circumstance. Although they are surrounded by drunkards, neither Gatsby nor Cohn drinks.[4] Each is always extremely polite and extremely careful not to hurt other people's feelings--behavior which contrasts sharply with the bullying of Tom Buchanan (p. 121) or Mike Campbell (p. 141). They also follow the rule according to which one should speak no evil. When Jake, in need of some gossip for his paper, asks Cohn "Do you know any dirt?" (p. 9), Cohn answers that he does not. He is in fact the only character in the book who never says anything unkind about anyone, except when he calls Jake "a pimp." But even then he is acting out of a higher sense of chivalric values (p. 190).

External correctness should match moral correctness, and the courtly lover must keep himself always neat and

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[4]On one occasion Cohn seems to be drunk, but his intoxication has nothing boisterous or distasteful about it; he sleeps like a child in the back room of the wine shop (p. 158).

elegant. To Jake's great exasperation, Cohn spends a great deal of time at the barber shop (pp. 97,150). Gatsby's appearance, too, is always impeccable; Nick notices that his hair seems to be trimmed every day. He pays a great deal of attention to his clothes, which are always fresh and specially ordered for him in London each new season (p. 93). On one occasion Gatsby is described in what seems to be a modern transposition of Lancelot's attire in Von Zatzikhoven's Lanzelet. Gatsby is clad "in a white flannel suit, silver shirt, and gold colored tie," (p. 85) as bright as Lancelot when the Lady of the Lake presents him with "an armour as white as swan--a coat of mail all hung with little golden bells."[5] Gatsby often wears white suits, like another White Knight of modern times, Lord Jim.

A much more important trait of the courtly lover shared by Gatsby and Cohn is his isolation. Like Tristan, envied and slandered by King Mark's knights, Gatsby and Cohn stand as outsiders, almost outcasts, opposite the social groups to which their ladyloves belong. Gatsby is a newly rich man, an upstart, despised by Tom, who fancies himself a member of some Midwestern aristocracy (pp. 6,13,18). Cohn

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[5]W. H. Nitze, Arthurian Romance and Modern Poetry and Music (Chicago, 1940), p. 48.

had to suffer all his life for being a Jew (p. 3), a circumstance Mike Campbell does not allow him to forget (p. 177). Thus, according to the social and racial prejudices of Daisy and Brett's classes, Gatsby and Cohn do love "in too lofty a place"[6] as did Tristan and Lancelot before them.

Daisy and Brett also share definite attributes of the feminine characters in the old romances. These women often were of mythical origin, endowed with supernatural powers and irresistible to mortals.[7] Such were Iseult and Guinevere, both outstanding in their beauty, noble birth and skills. Daisy and Brett are beautiful; they belong to the upper classes; they have always been unhampered by a lack of resources in the fulfillment of their desires. Surrounded by suitors, they have grown whimsical and impatient. Daisy could not bear to wait until Gatsby's return:

> She wanted her life shaped now, immediately--and the decision must be made by some force--of love, of money, or unquestionable practicality--that was close at hand. (p. 151)

Having fallen in love with Romero, Brett must have him; she cajoles Jake to lead her to him, having no consideration for his own suffering. She explains her motivation: "I've got

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[6]Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World (New York, 1956), p. 95.

[7]Nitze, p. 15.

to do something. I've got to do something I really want to do." (p. 183)

There are in Daisy's and Brett's personalities the same elements of magical attraction to men which are to be found in the Arthurian fays. It is no coincidence that Daisy's last name is Fay. Like Iseult of Ireland and like the Faraway Princess, Daisy lives in a "white palace" across the water (p. 5). People listened in wonder to Iseult's sweet singing, for there was no secret of music or song in which she was not versed.[8] Daisy's most striking characteristic is the compelling magic of her voice:

> Daisy began to sing with the music in a husky, rhythmic whisper, bringing out a meaning in each word that it had never had before and would never have again. When the melody rose, her voice broke up sweetly, following it, in a way contralto voices have, and each change tipped out a little of her warm human magic upon the air. (p. 109)

We have already seen that, originally, the lady was a symbol of Divine Light for the knight. Everything around Daisy is suggestive of a strange complicity between her and light. She loves daylight and waits all year long for the longest day of the year (p. 12). Furthermore, light likes her:

> For a moment the last sunshine fell with romantic affection upon her glowing face; her voice compelled

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[8] Gottfried Von Strasbourg, op. cit., VI, p. 72.

> forward breathlessly as I listened--then the glow faded, each light deserting her with lingering regret, like children leaving a pleasant street at dusk. (p. 14)

Everything about Daisy is brightness: her very name, her white clothes, her white house, her white car (p. 75). The first time she appears to the reader she is clad in white and her dress is fluttering as if "she had just blown back in after a short flight around the house," (p. 8) a comparison which immediately brings to mind the vision of a fairy. Besides white, the two colors with which Daisy is often associated are blue, symbol of spirituality, and green, symbol of hope, youth and healing.[9] Through her special attributes Daisy thus seems to fit very well into the symbolical image of the lady in the Romances. Fitzgerald gives no detailed portrait of her: she is presented in an impressionistic manner, surrounded by a sort of blurred aura. Fitzgerald himself feared that her character would be too vague. On the contrary, such haziness is suggestive of the elusive quality of her charm. The reader is kept wondering about her almost until the end, half-charmed, half-repelled.

Brett Ashely, in contrast, is presented in a much more direct fashion. Whereas Daisy seems to be, at times, an

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[9] J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (London, 1962), pp. 52,53,54 and 162.

epitome of femininity, Brett appears almost masculine in her way of dressing and of behaving. She wears tweeds in the daytime, and black at night. There is nothing vaporous or fragile about her, no suggestion of freshness, no play of lights and colors (p. 22). The contrast between her and Daisy is sharp, but she is no less of an enchantress. Robert Cohn compares her, rightly, to Circe (p. 144). Whereas Daisy is associated with light, Brett--who seems obsessed with bathing--reminds us of Morgain, the Arthurian fay who is always connected with water, and frequently associated with the sirens and Circe herself. Morgain, contrary to the other fays, had amorous relations with several knights.[10] Like Iseult, Brett has a talent for nursing those who are wounded. She took care of Jake when she met him in a hospital during the war (p. 38); later she looks after Romero when he is badly beaten up (p. 203).

To conclude, then, it would seem quite clear that Robert Cohn, Jay Gatsby, Daisy Fay, and Brett Ashley are all possessed with enough characteristics and traits of Medieval Romance figures to consider them as related to

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[10] L. A. Paton, Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance (New York, 1960), p. 61.

Romantic prototypes, if, in fact, not near equivalents. Moreover, their relationships to one another, to others and to the concept of Courtly Love will, I hope, constitute further proof of this relation to the Romantic Myth.

## CHAPTER III

## THE ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

In addition to resembling chivalric prototypes, some of Fitzgerald's and Hemingway's characters seem to live only for the possibility of participating in "the game" of love. Cohn, for instance, gives up fishing with Jake Barnes and Bill Gorton to go straight from the barbershop to a rendezvous with Brett (p. 101)--thus demonstrating the totality of his involvement with what is a chivalric goal.

Moreover, as Rougemont emphasizes in his analysis of the Tristan myth, the lover is more in love with love than with another person. Passion gives him the impression of living to the fullest; it is the intensity of the feeling which is pursued. Victims of passion are people who are susceptible to it because of their very nature, like Gatsby in whom Nick recognizes "a Romantic readiness" (p. 2) such as he never met in anyone else. The lover chooses someone who seems to fit a preconceived ideal. Love is then based on no real appraisal of the other but merely on appearances and on his idealization of the loved one's character. Thus Gatsby does not really fall in love with Daisy, whose true

character he never perceives, but with her glamour and all that she stands for: respectability, wealth, and sophistication. She is for him, "High in a white palace the king's daughter, the golden girl . . ." (p. 120). In the same way Cohn falls in love with Brett because of her beauty and style. He is impressed by her title, and starts immediately to reconstruct her personality in terms of his own aspirations. He tells Jake, " . . . there is a certain quality about her, a certain fineness. She seems to be absolutely fine and straight" (p. 38). Cohn stands at a critical moment of his existence; he suffers from the feeling that his life is going by without his taking advantage of it (p. 10). His encounter with Brett gives him the desired opportunity to live more intensely.

A second point made by Rougemont is that Tristan and Iseult love each other

> . . . from the standpoint of self and not from the other's standpoint: their unhappiness thus originates in a false reciprocity, which disguises a twin narcissism.[1]

Effectively what Gatsby and Cohn are looking for in their love is the sense of their own identity. As Frances Clyne is well aware, what Cohn enjoys most in an affair is the thought of

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[1]Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World (New York, 1956), p. 55.

having a mistress (p. 51), which could just as well apply to Brett. Brett however marks a clear progress in Cohn's estimate of himself, for now he can say he has had "an affair with a lady of title" (p. 170).

The narcissistic aspect of passion is still more essential for Gatsby, for it is his love which gives unity and purpose to his whole existence. If he loses love he loses his identity as well. From Gatsby's way of talking about the past Nick gathers that " . . . he wanted to recover some idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy" (p. 111). On the other hand, Daisy, bored and neglected by her husband, finds in Gatsby's worship an opportunity to re-evaluate her image of herself. She revives in his adoration (pp. 97,110). It would be a beautiful romantic gesture to let this man steal her away with all the strength of his tenacious passion.

Passionate love is by definition fatal and irresistible. In the Tristan Myth " . . . the irrevocable drinking of the potion . . . symbolizes a soul's election by omnipotent love."[2] The incarnation scene in chapter six of The Great Gatsby is primarily a beautiful transposition into modern terms of the potion scene. Here the exchange of a kiss takes

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[2]Rougemont, p. 152.

on all the solemnity and magic of the drinking of the love potion. Gatsby is closer perhaps to Lancelot than to Tristan, since he is well aware of the sacred character of the commitment he is making, and is making it of his own choice. Once the kiss is given though, this choice becomes irrevocable and Gatsby finds " . . . that he had committed himself to the following of a grail" (p. 149). Another function of the philtre was to give an alibi to passion, so that the lovers escaped the responsibility of a moral judgment and appeared as victims. Brett, falling in love with Romero the first time she sees him, views her desire as a tyranny she cannot resist:

> I'm a goner. I'm mad about the Romero boy. I'm in love with him, I think.
> I wouldn't be if I were you.
> I can't help it. I'm a goner. It's tearing me all up inside.
> Don't do it.
> I can't help it. I've never been able to help anything. (p. 183)

According to Rougemont, passion is comparable to a drug, which produces intoxication but fails to produce satisfaction, the craving for intensity never relenting. Passion thus subsists mainly on obstruction:

> Passion is that form of love which refuses the immediate, avoids dealing with what is near, and

> if necessary invents distance in order to realize and exult itself more completely.[3]

This explains why the theme of adultery is so essential to the Courtly tradition. Obstacles are generally of a social nature and a husband constitutes the most convenient symbol of society's opposition to the passion of the lovers. This is why Cohn does not object at all to going to Pamplona in the company of Brett and Mike. In his own eyes he is fitting into the most flattering part, the one of the lover (pp. 84, 99). Both Daisy and Brett belong to other men. Furthermore, Daisy is separated from Jay by class and wealth barriers. Brett finds an obstacle to overcome in Romero's circle of friends, who resent her as an intruder, a foreigner and an emancipated woman. The obstacle, however, is sometimes other than social. That is the case of Brett and Jake, whose predicament is curiously similar to that of the historical lovers Heloïse and Abélard. The loved one being more real in absence than in presence, parting appears as one of the leitmotivs of Courtly love. The last afternoon Daisy and Gatsby spend together before he goes to war is a privileged moment, perhaps the most rewarding of their whole relationship:

> That afternoon had made them tranquil for a while, as if to give them a deep memory for the long

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[3]Denis de Rougemont, Love Declared (New York, 1963), p. 41.

> parting the next day promised. They had never been closer in their month of love, nor communicated more profoundly one with another, than when she brushed silent lips against his coat's shoulder or when he touched the end of her fingers, gently, as though she were asleep. (p. 150)

Later we find again the traditional theme of presence in absence when Gatsby makes his pilgrimage to Louisville, to revisit all the places where Daisy and he were happy together (p. 152). Fitzgerald was quite aware of the necessity of distance to the survival of passion when he wrote, "Fulfillment destroys the dream."[4] Daisy is not given back to Gatsby long enough to destroy his dream, but hints are given of its potential disintegration. As soon as Gatsby is reunited with her, Nick perceives a certain disenchantment in his manner. The green light on her dock has lost its significance, " . . . his count of enchanted objects had diminished by one" (p. 94). Looking at them, Nick reflects how Daisy must have fallen short of Gatsby's expectations that afternoon. For no human grace or beauty could live up to such a potent illusion as Gatsby's.

Likewise, in Hemingway's novel, Brett, who is endlessly in search of passionate love, is particularly sensitive to the necessity of parting with what one loves in order to

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[4]Sergio Perosa, The Art of F. Scott Fitzgerald (Ann Arbor, 1965), p. 64.

preserve love itself. Jake pins down her character when he states that she only wants what she cannot have (p. 31). When Brett meets him after a long separation, Jake tells her it would be better for them not to see each other. Then she pleads "But, darling, I have to see you" (p. 26). Still, when he suggests that they live together, she refuses. Like Iseult, Brett is essentially " . . . the woman-from-whom-one-is-parted: to possess her is to lose her."[5] This is what Jake sadly realizes at the end of the novel, that love between them lasts only because it cannot be fulfilled. Had he been able to fulfill it, Brett would have slipped away from him. Brett's noble motive to send Romero away, that " . . . she is not one of those bitches that ruin children" (p. 243), is but a way to hide her failure in reducing Romero into another slave of love. In fact Romero is the anti-courtly hero, a man who would not yield in front of a woman any more than in front of a bull or a boxing champion. Most critics[6] take Brett's explanation of the situation for granted; but most certainly she could not ruin Romero, even if she chose to,

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[5]Rougemont, Love in the Western World, p. 298.

[6]Carlos Baker, Hemingway. The Writer as Artist (Princeton, 1963), p. 92; Robert W. Lewis, Jr., "Tristan or Jacob," ed. Max Westbrook, The Modern American Novel (New York, 1966), p. 112; Philip Young, Ernest Hemingway. A Reconsideration (University Park and London, 1966), p. 84.

because he would not let her. He makes this very clear on their first encounter when he tells her that the bulls are his best friends:

> 'You kill your friends?' she asked.
> 'Always,' he said in English, and laughed.
> 'So they don't kill me.' He looked at her across the table. (p. 186)

To keep him Brett would have to yield to his style of life: marry him, bear his children, grow her hair, accept second place after his art and his friends; in short, become tied down like an ordinary woman. She tells Jake that Pedro wanted to marry her so she could not leave him: " . . . he wanted to make sure I could never go away from him. After I'd gotten more womanly, of course" (p. 242). One cannot imagine a Mrs. Tristan; Brett cannot picture herself as the Señora Romero. She is like Cohn finally: it is the idea of having a love affair with a bull-fighter that she loves, not Pedro himself. If she married him it would be the end of all the romance. Fortunately, the moral justification she offers for giving him up constitutes a most beautiful obstacle, and enables her to treasure the memory of one more impossible passion.

Another essential element of Courtly Love is the ritual of Donnoi, or love's vassalage, which required from the lover courage, patience and humility, carried to the extreme of

enslavement in the service of the lady.[7] When Gatsby first appears to Nick, he is seen in a worshiping attitude, trembling and reaching with his arms toward the green light on Daisy's dock (p. 21). Cohn, seeing Brett for the first time, bears on his face " . . . that look of eager, deserving expectation . . . " (p. 22) that Moses must have had upon reaching the Promised Land. A hint of disapproval in Daisy's eyes makes Gatsby change his whole style of life (p. 114). For her sake he withstands with politeness and equanimity Tom's arrogance, and later his gross innuendoes about the sources of his wealth (pp. 121,129,130). Cohn makes an even better display of this kind of endurance. When Mike insults him, he accepts it all bravely:

> His face had the sallow, yellow look it got when he was insulted, but somehow he seemed to enjoy it. The childish, drunken heroics of it. It was his affair with a lady of title. (p. 178)

But when time comes to defend Brett's reputation, or to win her back, he is quite capable of courage. It is the lover's duty to watch over the well being and safety of the lady. Cohn insists that he has "brought" Mike and Brett to Pamplona, that without him they would never have arrived (p. 134). After Myrtle's death Gatsby intends to take on himself all

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[7] F. E. Guyer, Chrétien de Troyes: Inventor of the Modern Novel (New York, 1957), p. 81.

the responsibility of the accident, for which, in truth, he gives his life as a sacrifice. His only concern is for Daisy; he stands under her window all night, ready to protect her. Nick leaves him alone, feeling that his own presence " . . . marred the sacredness of the vigil" (p. 146). On one occasion, Cohn also keeps a silent vigil over Brett when after his dispute with Mike, he waits for her outside the cafe, in the shadow of the arcade (p. 182). Like Tristan and Lancelot, who had to rescue their ladies from brutal abductors, Gatsby and Cohn live in the delusion that the women they love are actually detained by their rivals in spite of themselves. Thus, when Cohn bursts into Brett and Romero's room, it is not only out of jealousy, but because he wants to save her and because he is so sure that she loves him, too, in spite of appearances: "He was going to stay, and true love would conquer all" (p. 199). It is in this attitude of vassalage to love that Jake Barnes, who all along affects a realistic outlook and contempt for Cohn's romanticism, reveals himself as a restrained romantic, still more a victim of passion than Cohn himself. When Brett, exasperated by Cohn's humble and obstinate quest of her, tells Jake that <u>he</u> would not behave so badly, Jake confesses "I'd be as big an ass as Cohn" (p. 181). In truth he is obeying the ritual of <u>Donnoi</u>,

yielding to all the whims and commands of a capricious lady. In their description of Lancelot in Le Roman de la Charette, Cross and Nitze cite a similar pattern of behavior: Lancelot is constantly striving " . . . to submit to the dictates of Guenevere, herself a sufferer in love's cause, even when they lower him in the estimation of others."[8] Such a description fits very well the scene where Brett begs Jake to lead her to Romero, in spite of all the suffering it must inflict on him and in spite of the fact that it makes him "a pimp" in the eyes of his friends (p. 190). Later, when she has sent Romero away, Brett summons Jake to her rescue. He goes to Madrid, perfectly aware of his abjection and accepting it:

> That was it. Send a girl off with one man. Introduce her to another to go off with him. Now go and bring her back. And sign the wire with love. That was it all right. (p. 239)

In the Courtly Tradition love was regarded an ennobling experience, which actually uplifted the lover. Forbearance on his part carried its own reward, in the same manner as Christian humility. Thus, in spite of Gatsby's vulgarity and of his doubtful past, Nick can tell Gatsby that he is worth " . . . the whole damn bunch put together" (p. 154). Love was the incentive behind the knight's accomplishments. Gatsby

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[8] T. P. Cross and W. A. Nitze, Lancelot and Guenevere (Chicago, 1930), p. 69.

fought bravely during the war and strove doggedly to succeed in order to win Daisy, his ultimate goal. He could say, like Lancelot:

> She it is for love of whom I have done mighty deeds of arms whereof all the world speaketh. She it is that brought me from poverty to riches and from want to all earthly good.[9]

Chivalry was an institution in which the sexes balanced and completed each other ideally, the knight's valor inspiring love, and the lady's love inspiring valor. The relationship between Brett and Romero offers some reflection of this. Brett falls in love while watching Romero in the ring. It is quite a change from her other affairs. Romero's bravery seems to give a justification to this one. Brett feels regenerated: coming to Jake after her first night with the bull-fighter she looks radiant in the bright day. "I feel altogether changed . . . " she tells him, " . . . You've no idea, Jake" (p. 207). In return Brett's love inspires Romero, who shows greatness that afternoon in spite of his injuries. Jake can read his love for Brett in the way he handles the fight, " . . . everything of which he could control the locality he did in front of her all afternoon" (p. 216). Finally, the afternoon is consummated with the presentation

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[9]W. A. Nitze, Arthurian Romance and Modern Poetry and Music (Chicago, 1940), p. 56.

of the lover's token, here the ear of a bull that had killed a man (p. 220).

Still, all things considered, the benefits of passion seem to weigh much less in the balance than the misery which it imparts and which is so often deliberately sought. What makes men seek for passion then, and all the unhappiness it brings, in spite of its condemnation by morals and by reason? Rougemont's answer is that passion, if fulfilled, is doomed to flare up and die swiftly. What the lovers want to prolong and to renew endlessly is the suffering itself, the "branding" of desire.[10] We read in the private diary of Novalis, the German Romantic:

> Whoever loves must everlastingly remain aware of the surrounding void, and keep the wound open. May God grant me that I shall preserve this pain which is exquisitely dear to me . . .[11]

Jake, the sober one, is well aware of the mingling of joy and pain when he tells Brett, who complains about their misery, that being in love is "a lot of fun," in spite of everything (p. 27). One thinks of Tristan's cry when he learns about the potion: "Were it death or life, the poison was sweet."[12]

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[10] Rougemont, Love in the Western World, p. 41.

[11] Ibid., p. 231.

[12] Gottfried Von Strasbourg, The Story of Tristan and Iseult (London, 1899), p. 19, Vol. II.

One essential reason for such an attitude is that suffering is seen by the Western psyche as a privileged mode of understanding, the surest means to reach self-awareness. That is what Cohn, so concerned about not really living his life, is groping for awkwardly.

But the passionate lover is victim of a delusion when he thinks that love enables him to live more fully. In truth it is a sickness of the soul, which leads to obsession; an impoverishment of the mind, a lessening of sensibility which deprives life of its diversity. When Cohn falls in love with Brett, his tennis game goes all to pieces; he is unable to work on his second book; he does not really participate in any of his friends' activities (pp. 45,101). After his fight with Romero, his dream crumbles and he finds that "Now everything's gone. Everything" (p. 195). Cohn's case nevertheless is much less representative than Gatsby's. Rougemont points out how, when the lady ceased to be wooed as a symbol of perfect love and became a goal in herself, passion lost its mystical value, while retaining a divine and falsely transcendent element.[13] From the moment when he physically possesses Iseult, thus profaning mystic love, Tristan limits himself to unhappy and frustrating human passion, which can

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[13]Rougemont, Love in the Western World, p. 179.

only lead to death. The beauty of woman becomes then a lure into destruction for the hero. That limitation of man by woman is nowhere better described than in the incarnation scene in Gatsby; this scene fits so beautifully and perfectly in the mythical context that it deserves to be quoted in full:

> Out of the corner of his eye Gatsby saw that the blocks of the sidewalks really formed a ladder and mounted to a secret place above the trees--he could climb to it, if he climbed alone, and once there he could suck on the pap of life, gulp down the incomparable milk of wonder.
>
> His heart beat faster and faster as Daisy's white face came up to his own. He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of a God. So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning-fork that had been struck upon a star. Then he kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete. (p. 112, emphasis mine)

To love that way is the contrary of living. Gatsby's universe becomes so narrowly confined to his obsession with Daisy that after the accident he is unable to show the slightest concern for the victim; he can only think of Daisy's reaction (p. 144). Instead of expanding, his sensibility has shrunk. When love disappears nothing is left to the lover. Nick thinks how empty, cold and meaningless the world must have looked to Gatsby if he did realize, before his death, that Daisy had forsaken him:

> He must have felt that he had lost the old warm world, paid a high price for living too long with a single dream. (p. 162)

I have discussed the relationships of individuals to the Courtly tradition, and reviewed the main aspects of passion--the religion of love, the need for obstruction, the ritual of vassalage, the joy of suffering, the ennobling function of love balanced by the impoverishment of the soul that it causes. I will turn now to the relationships of the romantic lovers to their social environment.

# CHAPTER IV

## THE WORLDS IN WHICH ROMANTIC LOVE TAKES PLACE

The worlds in which romantic love takes place must also be considered, since passion appears first as a protest against society.[1] Indeed, it would be wrong to assume that poets and troubadours were depicting the reality around them when they sang of Courtly love. In spite of the Cours d' Amour in Provence, Courtly poetry was on the whole in flat contradiction with its time. In fact, Courtly chivalry was a form of revolt against Feudalism, which was founded on materialistic values and in which life was totally oriented toward war, hunting and male companionship. In that society women played only the part of mere commodities. The Courtly ideal represented thus " . . . a pole of attraction for thwarted spiritual aspirations. It was a form of romantic escape at the same time as a brake applied to instinct."[2] The postwar society depicted by Fitzgerald and Hemingway was

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[1]Denis de Rougemont, Love Declared (New York, 1963), p. 70.

[2]Rougemont, Love in the Western World (New York, 1956), p. 262.

also a materialistic society, still shaking after a long period of violence, and ruled by brutal men like Tom Buchanan. In this world it was not surprising that more sensitive beings, like Gatsby and Cohn, aspired to an idealized vision of life.

Marriage in the feudal world was a matter of a strictly practical nature to such a degree that Marie de Champagne's famous Court of Love delivered a judgment according to which love and marriage were absolutely incompatible.[3] Thus Iseult married King Mark for political reasons. Daisy, craving stability, gives up Gatsby for Tom, not because of his personal attraction, but because of the "bulkiness" (p. 151) of his position. He is rich, he belongs to the same social stratum, and he treats her like a princess; marrying him is the most sensible thing to do. Jordan Baker remembers how Tom came to the wedding, spending money like a king, followed by a suite of one hundred people and bringing Daisy the regal present of a three-hundred fifty thousand dollar string of pearls. They married in June " . . . with more pomp and circumstance than Louisville ever knew before" (p. 77). In The Sun Also Rises marriage appears again as primarily a question of interest. Brett, who shrinks from marrying Romero for love, has married twice for money and is about to do it again in

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[3] Ibid., p. 35.

spite of her amorous feelings for Jake, and later Romero (pp. 39,243). In the Romances the husbands were held in contempt most of the time, but they were all-powerful nonetheless and exercised tyrannical rights over their wives, as husbands did in actual life. Brett's first husband mistreated her, had her sleep on the floor and threatened to kill her (p. 203). Tom Buchanan also treats his women like pieces of furniture. Once he nearly breaks his mistress' nose in an argument (p. 37).

In truth Tom is an almost perfect transposition into a modern context of the feudal lord. His whole life is oriented toward physical efforts and gratification; polo replaces tournaments and football substitutes for warfare. Nick observes that he has "a cruel body" (p. 7), which a suit of armour would become better than elegant riding-clothes. Firmly entrenched in his physical and social power, Tom is used to seeing people yield before him; his manner is arrogant and supercilious. Nick remarks that he moves people around like checkers on a checker-board (p. 12). Because his vast inherited fortune allows him to live in idleness and luxury, and because he has been to an elite university, Tom looks upon himself as a kind of aristocrat (pp. 6,130).[4]

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[4]For example, like the feudal lords, who considered themselves as defenders of Christendom against the infidels

His imperialism and self-righteousness are nowhere more apparent than in his treatment of women. His wife is his property. He remembers his love for her only when he realizes that his rights are threatened. Here again, as he did once with the incarnation scene, Fitzgerald captures a beautiful, decisive scene in close accordance with The Story of Tristan. The main characters are gathered at the Buchanan's for lunch. It is stifling hot and Daisy tells Jay he looks very cool:

> Their eyes met, and they stared at each other, alone in space. With an effort she glanced down at the table.
>
> 'You always look so cool,' she repeated. She had told him that she loved him, and Tom Buchanan saw. He was astounded. . . . He got up, his eyes still flashing between Gatsby and his wife. (p. 119)

In the Romance the lovers speak with their eyes: "Each knew the mind of the other, yet was their speech of other things."[5] One day their exchange of glances betray them to King Mark:

> Their glances were so soft, so sweet, so full of longing, that they went to his heart, and such anger awoke therein, such hatred and envy that his senses were bewildered, and he knew not what to do.[6]

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and the heretics, Tom sets himself up as a representative of civilization, endangered in the modern world by bootleggers and colored empires (pp. 13,130).

[5]Gottfried Von Strasbourg, The Story of Tristan and Iseult (London, 1899), II, p. 13.

[6]Ibid., p. 105.

Tom is deeply concerned about the freedom of modern women; he thinks they should be watched more closely by their families (p. 104). Of course Tom is thinking here of the safety of girls like Daisy or Jordan--nice, respectable girls from his world. Low class women, chambermaids, and garage-keepers' wives are fair game to him. His respect for family does not extend as far down the social ladder as Wilson's marriage. Tom's gruff and scornful manner with Wilson shows clearly that, in his own eyes, he is only exercising a legitimate droit du Seigneur over Myrtle (pp. 25,123). The vulgar, almost bestial quality of their affair strikes a most ironical contrast with Gatsby's "incorruptible dream" (p. 155).

Mike Campbell is as much caught up in materialistic living as Tom. More likable as a person, he loves Brett enough to respect her freedom and bear her whims, but he remains a bully and a drunkard. His love for Brett is marred by no superfluous spirituality. She is "a lovely piece" he can afford because he is going to be very rich (p. 79). As a member of the upper-classes he shares Tom's social and racial prejudices. He despises Cohn for being an intellectual and a Jew. In The Sun Also Rises the world of the aficionados offers an interesting reflection of Feudalism. The bullfights fill somewhat the same function in the novel as tournaments

did in the old romance. Both share a strong dramatic, romantic and erotic element: such contests of strength, skill and valor, with their pompous and colorful staging and above all death hovering in the background, act as a goal to desire. The world of the aficionados tolerates woman only in the home, as a mother and wife; otherwise she is resented as a corrupting influence. One should not be deceived by the heroic aspect of bullfighting. Danger, courage, and beauty are there, but also commercialism and worldly ambition. In Spain there is no other means for a poor young man to become rich quickly. Hemingway rather underplays that side of the picture, but not enough to justify Carlos Baker's representation of Romero as the epitome of all perfections.[7] When Brett reads Pedro's future in his hand, he asks her if he will be a millionaire. She tells him she sees many bulls. Romero laughs with pleasure, "Good. . . . at a thousand duros a piece" (p. 185). He takes care of his public image like a movie star; he does not speak English because this would not become a bullfighter (p. 186). For the same reason he is rather ashamed to be associated with Brett and asks her not to unfold his cape in front of her at the bullfight, but to

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[7]Carlos Baker, Hemingway the Writer as Artist (Princeton, 1963), p. 86.

keep it discreetly on her knees (p. 213). Pedro's values are in some respect quite down to earth, and he is far from conforming to the austerity of a Belmonte. He drinks, smokes, Speaks English and sleeps with women (Brett is his third woman and he is only eighteen). Tristan and Lancelot had betrayed the feudal code by putting the service of their ladies above it. Jake, whom the aficionados regarded as one of them, betrays the code by exposing Romero to the dangerous seduction of woman. Fortunately the bullfighter has been so thoroughly steeped in his own world that he cannot be fatally affected by his attachment for Brett.

Characters and situations in The Great Gatsby and The Sun Also Rises offer numerous and definite similarities to those commonly found in the Tristan myth. Yet one element is missing, perhaps the most important of all: passion fails to unite the lovers through the liberation of a triumphant death. Gatsby's solitary end constitutes a sad anti-climax to the Liebestod; as for the other characters they will go on living, searching most probably for a new love. In the next chapter the main reasons for the failure of the myth in its modern context will be explored.

# CHAPTER V

## THE FAILURE OF THE MYTH

At the beginning, according to the Courtly tradition the lady occupied a position of great moral superiority. To be worthy of her, the lover had to go through a deliberate initiation, which lifted him above the sensual and social concerns of material life. One of the theses of Love in the Western World is that after the thirteenth century, the myth underwent a secularization process, losing progressively all its ethical and spiritual content, until its tragic element finally dwindled into mediocrity.[1]

The Great Gatsby and The Sun Also Rises are examples of that profanation. One thing which accounts for the failure of the myth in these works is that we find in them no real mutual passion. Gatsby loves Daisy more than she loves him; Jake loves Brett more than she loves him; Brett loves Romero romantically, but he loves her according to a pre-chivalric version of love; Brett does not love Cohn. Jake

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[1]Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World (New York, 1956), Book IV, Chap. 9.

and Brett are the closest parallel to Tristan and Iseult;[2] but it is hard to accept an Iseult who successively loves several Tristans. Passion is by definition unique. The heroines of the romances give their favor to the best of knights and are faithful until death. When Abélard was deprived of his manhood, Heloïse took vows of future perpetual abstinence. Brett chooses promiscuity. In the Middle Ages the word nunnery meant "convent," but also "a house of ill fame" in slang.[3] Perhaps this is why Hemingway mentions that Brett and Mike once stay at a brothel (p. 83). If this is intentional, then we can say that Brett also goes to a nunnery like Heloise, and the inversion then becomes complete.

On the whole the modern lovers lack moral fiber. The medieval ones defy both society and God in order to protect their love. Thus Iseult dares to challenge God when she faces the red-hot iron ordeal.[4] On the contrary when Tom reveals to Daisy that she would have to give up her respectability to marry Gatsby, she shrinks from the commitments of

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[2]Robert W. Lewis, Jr., Hemingway on Love (Austin and London, 1965); see the chapter "Tristan or Jacob."

[3]James A. H. Murray, et. al., eds. A New Dictionary on Historical Principles (Oxford, 1888), VI, p. 264.

[4]Gottfried Von Strasbourg, The Story of Tristan and Iseult (London, 1899), Vol. II, p. 85.

actual love (p. 135). The game is over because she has put no real emotion into her affair with Gatsby. In The Great Gatsby and The Sun Also Rises Romantic Love is doomed from the start because of the unworthiness of the love object. Both Hemingway and Fitzgerald dealt with the archetype of the destroying woman, incapable of love and faithfulness. Daisy thus exists on two levels: for Gatsby she is the symbol of the ideal; for Fitzgerald, the symbol of evil. We have seen that Daisy is often associated with colors and images suggestive of freshness and purity. Under Jay's kisses " . . . she blossomed like a flower" (p. 112). Once, coming to Gatsby's tea party in the rain, smiling under the dripping lilac trees and a lavender hat, with her wet hair striking her cheek like a dash of blue paint (p. 86) she calls to mind T. S. Eliot's hyacinth girl, promise of regeneration.[5] Some of these images, however, have disturbing implications at times. Nick describes Daisy and Jordan lying on the couch, " . . . like silver idols weighing down their own white dresses against the singing breeze of the fan" (p. 115). The word idol is recurrent in the novel in connection with

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[5]T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land from The American Tradition in Literature, Scalley Bradley, ed. (New York, 1962). In Vol. II, p. 1187, ll. 31-42, are lines which evoke directly the Tristan Myth.

Daisy, and is used to modify the traditional values of silver and white. An idol is a false divinity, a hard and cold inanimate object. Such is the real Daisy: her grace and beauty are illusory, they are a mask for moral indifference and shallowness. Her life is a series of poses. Nick feels her basic insincerity when she tries to impress him with her cynicism, "I've been everywhere and seen everything and done everything" she says, "Sophisticated--God, I'm sophisticated!" (p. 18). Furthermore, the colors with which Daisy is associated are symbols of antithetical tendencies: if blue is the color of faithfulness and innocence, it is also "the color of plagues and things hurtful."[6] Green represents vegetation, life and hope, but it is also the color of corpses, symbol of death and decay.[7]

Brett also appears as an idol once, when the riau-riau dancers single her out in the crowd and dance around her as around the image of a pagan goddess (p. 155). In the scene when she asks Jake to lead her to Romero, Brett indulges in the same kind of self-satisfied cynicism as Daisy:

> 'I've always done just what I wanted.'
> 'I know.'

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[6]James A. H. Murray, I, p. 943.

[7]J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (London, 1962), pp. 52,54.

'I do feel such a bitch.'
'Well,' I said.
'My God!' said Brett, 'The things a woman goes through.'
'Yes?' (p. 184)

Brett's superiority over Daisy is that she is an honest bitch-goddess. She makes no pretense of feminine propriety and admits candidly that she takes what she wants. Like Daisy, she is selfish and careless, but she is also a victim like the other characters in the book, groping for a reason for living. In spite of her scorn for Cohn's romanticism she clutches at a few illusions of her own: she deludes herself about the real nature of her parting from Romero and she persists in thinking that, if Jake had not been wounded, everything would have been possible between them (p. 247).

Both women also invert the role of the Courtly lady in that instead of helping the hero to free himself from the fetters of worldly concerns and to reach the Divine Light, Daisy and Brett lead them into corruption and darkness. What Daisy actually symbolizes is success, money. When Gatsby wants to define the magic in her voice he says " . . . her voice is full of money" (p. 120). What Brett represents is the tyranny of sex. As Cohn wrote her once she, like Circe, " . . . turns men into swine" (p. 144). She offers all the fascination of the Dark Lady archetype; every man who

approaches her wants her and is degraded by his need for her. The sexual instinct appears then as a cruel fate of which she herself is a victim:

> 'I don't know,' she said. 'I don't want to go through that hell again.'
> 'We'd better keep away from each other.'
> 'But, darling, I have to see you. It's not all that you know.'
> 'No, but it always gets to be.' (p. 26)

The knight had to deserve his lady by completing noble deeds. Gatsby thinks that he can acquire Daisy with cash. To be able to do so, he resorts to very dubious means, perhaps even murder (pp. 134,135). Cohn has been compared by some critics to Don Quixote.[8] Perhaps it would be more appropriate to compare him to another great anti-romantic character of literature, Madame Bovary. Moreover the two comparisons hold well together since Flaubert was steeped in Cervantes, and Madame Bovary has often been called the Female Quixote.[9] Hemingway was familiar with both writers, and Madame Bovary figured in good position in the list of books that he admired most and " . . . that he acknowledged

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[8]Robert W. Lewis, Jr., p. 22; Robert O. Stephens, "Hemingway's Don Quixote in Pamplona," College English, 23 (December, 1961), pp. 216-218.

[9]B. F. Bart, Madame Bovary and the Critics (New York, 1966); see article by Harry Levin, "The Female Quixote," pp. 106, 131.

as his literary forbears,"[10] at the beginning of his career. No doubt R. W. Stallman goes too far when he says that Cohn " . . . exemplifies Christian decency, Courtly love, humanitarianism."[11] So does Carlos Baker when he pits Cohn against Romero and finds him guilty of cowardice, self-pity, rudeness and egotism.[12] Cohn comes out, on the whole, as a likeable, well-meaning idealist, very immature and a little priggish. Because they have learned about life from cheap romantic books, Emma Bovary and Cohn dream, not so much of love itself, as of the circumstances which accompany it. Like Emma, Cohn is unable to enjoy what is near at hand; he is rather insensitive to the picturesqueness of Spain and the charm of Paris, but he longs to discover South America guided by the romance of W. H. Hudson's The Purple Land (p. 9). To Don Quixote, Romance meant heroic adventure; to Emma and Cohn it means passionate love. Contrary to Don Quixote, whose fantasies were of an intellectual and altruistic nature, Emma's and Cohn's are essentially emotional and

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[10] Robert O. Stephens, Hemingway's Nonfiction. The Public Voice (Chapel Hill, 1968), p. 222.

[11] R. W. Stallman, The Houses that James Built (Michigan, 1961), p. 179.

[12] Carlos Baker, Hemingway. The Writer as Artist (Princeton, 1963), p. 86.

egotistical. It is evident that Hemingway meant to write an anti-romantic novel. Maxwell Perkins has described The Sun Also Rises as " . . . a healthy book, with marked satirical implications upon novels which are not-sentimentalized, subjective novels, marked by sloppy hazy thought."[13] If we compare the three romantic characters, Don Quixote, Emma and Cohn, we find that the romantic illusion, and consequently its satirization, has lost a great deal of its strength. There is grandeur in the Quixote. Emma, surrounded by mediocre men, is the only character in the book to show definite qualities of imagination and energetic action. In spite of their ridiculous natures, Don Quixote and Emma Bovary tower above the surrounding characters. Beside them Cohn remains an emotional adolescent; as Harvey Stone tells him once, he is " . . . a case of arrested development" (p. 44). Hemingway is more successful in his critique of romanticism when he shows the hold of romantic love on people like Brett and Jake, who pretend to reject romanticism and to be free of its conventions. Jake's inadequacy as a romantic hero lies in his scepticism. Where love was regarded in the Courtly tradition as an ennobling experience, he looks upon

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[13]This judgment is quoted from R. Burlingam, Of Making Many Books, by Carlos Baker, op. cit., p. 86.

it as a kind of infirmity. Mark Spilka calls him a "restrained romantic"[14] and R. W. Stallman argues that Jake " . . . rebels and disbelieves in that other side of his selfhood which Cohn represents."[15] Earl Rovit adopts a similar point of view when he stresses the similarities between Jake and Cohn, whom he calls Jake's "secret sharer."[16] The main opposition between the two characters lies in Cohn's inability to come to grips with reality, whereas Jake's understanding of experience is no longer clouded by illusions. Spilka's words, "restrained romantic," bring Flaubert back to mind once more. Flaubert confessed to being two men at the same time: the wild, flamboyant romantic of his youth and an ironical, disillusioned observer.[17] The latter could analyze with clinical lucidity whatever romantic dream he had retained from his youth, and thus was able to identify with his heroine to such an extent that he could say, "Madame

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[14]Mark Spilka, "The Death of Love in The Sun Also Rises," Ernest Hemingway. Critiques of Four Major Novels, Carlos Baker, ed. (New York, 1962), p. 19.

[15]R. W. Stallman, p. 10.

[16]Earl Rovit, Ernest Hemingway (New York, 1963), p. 152.

[17]About Flaubert's twofold literary personality see A. Lagarde and L. Michard, Dix-neuvième Siècle. Les Grands Auteurs Français du Programme (Paris, 1955), pp. 456-457.

Bovary c'est moi." It is not impossible to see in the relationship between Jake and Cohn the same kind of ambiguity that exists between Flaubert and his heroine. In some ways Jake can be seen as the creator of Cohn, since we only know the latter through Jake's consciousness.[18]

Of all the lovers we have examined, Gatsby is the only one who goes through the three great moments of Romantic Love: initiation, passion, and fatal fulfillment. He is the only one whose love is truly unique. Tristan died thinking that Iseult had forsaken him, but he was mistaken; and by joining him in death she turned their end into triumphant liberation. Gatsby waits in vain for Daisy's call as Tristan waited for the white sail. But the call never comes and Gatsby's death, far from being transfiguring, turns into a piece of bitter irony (p. 162). Daisy does not even send a flower.

In the conclusion to his study on Arthurian Romance and Modern Poetry and Music, W. A. Nitze states that it was not the goal which mattered to medieval man, but the aspiration:

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[18]See J. S. Rouch, "Jake Barnes as Narrator," Modern Fiction Studies (Winter, 1965-66), II, 361, 370. Rouch insists on the importance of interpreting The Sun Also Rises through Jake's personality and on the ironical quality of his view-point.

> Herein lies the universal application of the medieval doctrine. But here lies also its danger--the temptation on the part of the weak and shallow to yield to the mystical process in a debased form, as has happened time and again since the Middle Ages.[19]

The myth fails in The Great Gatsby and The Sun Also Rises because the modern world is no longer a world where the spirit can prevail over the flesh. Instead, it is a fragmentary world, deprived of any spiritual horizon and over which reigns the empty stare of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg.

## Conclusion

As early as the thirteenth century the Courtly tradition began to empty itself of its mystical content and turned into rhetoric, the main feature of which was excessive idealization of the profane object with which it dealt. This tendency finally provoked a realistic reaction. The Romance of the Rose exemplifies best this double movement. This work was begun by Guillaune de Lorris and finished by Jean de Meung, two writers of completely opposite temperaments. Even though The Romance of the Rose is today very tedious reading, it exercised a great influence on literature, each part having a separate influence. Lorris led to Dante,

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[19] W. A. Nitze, Arthurian Romance and Modern Poetry and Music (Chicago, 1940), p. 96.

Petrarch, and in their steps to Rousseau and the Romantics. Meung continued the tradition of the ancients who rejected passion as "a sickness of the soul"; he transmitted it

> . . . to the lower levels of French literature--to gauloiserie and the schools of broad Gallic jokes, to controversial rationalism and to a curiously exarcerbated misogyny, naturalism, and man's reduction to sex. All this has simply been pagan man's normal way of defending himself against the myth of unhappy love.[20]

Clearly Fitzgerald belongs to the first tradition and Hemingway continues the second. In his poem Lorris wanders, in a dream, through the garden of love. He finds a Rose, the ideal woman. To win her he experiences every conceivable ordeal, and finds help or hostility in many allegorical characters. He walks alone, inspired by a single desire, his passion exulting itself in solitude. The atmosphere is one of extreme unreality; the heroine is completely depersonalized. Gatsby also wanders in a garden, looking among a crowd of odd people for an elusive woman who bears a flower's name. He, too, walks in a dream, sustained by his illusion. Lorris' subtlety and grace contrast sharply with Meung's half of the romance, which constitutes a refutation more than a continuation of the first part. Meung cannot accept the fiction of ideal love as the source of virtues. He reduces it to the

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[20]Rougemont, Love in the Western World, pp. 186, 187.

instinct of procreation and he describes its power, its basic immorality, and its struggle against institutions which pretend to check it or to sublimate it. Love in his eyes is important as a natural force, nothing less, nothing more. His cult of nature, his realism, his hostility toward woman foreshadow Hemingway.

The main difference between the pictures of Romantic Love that we find in Fitzgerald and Hemingway lies in the value which is given to the vision of the idealistic character. Both authors condemn Romantic Love and point out its irrelevance to modern life, but their approaches differ. Hemingway had a definite idea of how life ought to be lived, and he used his authority to shut out what he could neither approve nor understand.[21] Thus the portrait of his idealistic lover, Cohn, is drawn with the heaviest of ironies. While condemning Romantic Love altogether, Hemingway shows a longing for the feudal concept of life undisturbed by woman. The fishing trip expresses this yearning for a world of physical action and male companionship, unspoiled by the complications of sentiment. For Hemingway as for Meung, it is unnatural, unhealthy and immoral for a man to make a woman

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[21]Tony Tanner, "Tough and Tender," Encounter, XXII (July, 1964), p. 62.

the goal of his life. With Pedro Romero he offers an alternative to the maimed lovers, Jake and Cohn. Romero loves Brett and does what he must to win her, but he would not give up anything important for her or do anything which would endanger his integrity. It is the woman's role to change and adapt herself to her man's world. This conception of love is nowhere better conveyed than in the second bull-fight scene, when Pedro fights in front of Brett:

> Because he did not look up to ask if it pleased he did it all for himself inside, and it strengthened him, and yet he did it for her, too. But he did not do it for her at any loss to himself. (p. 216)

In comparison with this cool and manly behavior, Cohn's way of loving appears absurd and artificial. By reducing the myth to the dimension of a psychological study, Hemingway brings about its dissolution and turns passion into nothing more than a sensual fret and a vague yearning for emotional gratification.

In The Great Gatsby the narrator is, on the contrary, sympathetic to the idealistic lover. Even if the content of Gatsby's vision is gaudy and corrupt, the longing it expresses is beautiful, and the strength of his passion elevates him above the other characters in Nick Carraway's eyes. Fitz-gerald's critique of Romantic Love is much more effective

than Hemingway's because it is done from the inside. As Tony Tanner sees it,

> Fitzgerald was a romantic whose work includes a definite critique of Romanticism: as in Gatsby he understood both 'the dream' and the 'foul dust' that floats in its wake.[22]

Reading The Sun Also Rises, written so soon after Gatsby, and remembering the circumstances of its composition, one can wonder whether Hemingway did not attempt what Jean de Meung had done with The Romance of the Rose: to complete and correct what he regarded as a good novel but a warped view of life. There is unfortunately no way to prove it now. If this were one of his purposes, he only succeeded in showing the unrelenting hold of the romantic myth on the Western psyche, without sensing either its beauty or its whole import. Fitzgerald, on the contrary, understood, like medieval man, that it is not the goal which matters but the aspiration. Because of his sense of the past and his sense of beauty, he felt the magic and the vigor of the old myth which is still hovering in the back of modern man's consciousness, still obsessing him even though he has lost the key to its meaning. This is perhaps what Nick feels confusedly and struggles to express when he reflects on Gatsby's tale of love:

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[22]Tony Tanner, p. 73.

> Through all he said, even through his appalling sentimentality, I was reminded of something--an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago. For a moment a phrase tried to take shape on my mouth and my lips parted like a dumb man's, as though there was more struggling upon them than a wisp of startled air. But they made no sound, and what I almost remembered was uncommunicable forever. (p. 112)

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